

## **Media Tips**

The media—i.e., television, radio, newspapers and other publications—is a trusted source for information and influences public opinion. News coverage of your public health event can help create greater awareness in your community about not only the event, but about all the good work public health is doing in your community and across Washington, and can help you educate your audiences about the value of public health.

Because no one can control media coverage, it is helpful to design an event that does not rely solely on media attention. Using the strategies in this guide will help you maximize your chances of garnering good media attention. However, other direct communication tactics should also be planned to prevent over-reliance on media coverage, since breaking news is unpredictable. Here are some tips to help your organization put its best foot forward in attracting media attention for a public health event.

### **Make a media list.**

When you know the names, telephone and fax numbers, email and special interests of individual journalists, you can send materials and news releases directly to those most likely to use them. Newsrooms receive hundreds of news releases per day. Getting your news release to the correct person is half the battle.

- Call local television, radio and print media to get the name and contact information for whoever covers the health beat.
- Do a web search on local media's Web sites.
- Scan newspapers and monitor radio and television shows to learn the names of reporters who cover health and safety topics.
- Check media directories, which are available online, at libraries, or through organizations such as the Public Relations Society of America.
- Consider collaborating with partner organizations that already have an updated media list.
- Add information about deadlines, special interests and informational needs when you are researching your list.
- Update the list every few months. The media work in a very fast-paced environment. Reporters change jobs frequently.

### **Write a news release.**

A news release is a written document that gives an overview of your event to a reporter, editor or producer. The news release should:

- Be timely, newsworthy, well-written and edited
- Answer: Who? What? Why? When? Where?
- Be short and concise (2 pages maximum)
- Follow Associated Press Style
- Include a contact person, phone number and email address that is up-to-date and accurate
- Promote your event's visual appeal. Whether it is a TV camera or a print photograph, news is visual. Include information about photo opportunities at the end of the release.
- Include one or two quotes from influential people in the community to help draw attention to your event. Be sure to get their permission before sending the news release to the media.

Send the news release five to seven days before the event (it can be faxed or emailed). Remember to send your release to all the different types of media outlets in your area, including television, radio, print, alternative media and internet media sources. See a sample news release in Appendix A.

A media advisory – a one-page synopsis of the news release that gives only the who, what, when and where – may be sent a month prior to the event to community calendars and again two to three days prior as a reminder. Community calendars are often listed through a variety of sources, including television, radio and print media, the Chamber of Commerce, local community centers and local colleges and universities. See a sample media advisory in the Appendix A.

### **Make follow-up calls.**

News releases should always be followed by a phone call. A follow-up call is your opportunity to tell a reporter about your event. It helps remind reporters of your event and also ensures that your news release was received.

- Call reporters between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. This is after their morning staff meeting and before afternoon deadlines.
- When you call, say to a reporter, "I want to tell you about a significant event to help our community stay healthy." Then ask, "Is now a good time?" If not, find out when you can call them back. Remember, the media operates off deadlines.

- Think about what you will say before you call. You probably have about 60 seconds to convey that this is a newsworthy event and important public health information.
- Consider your event from a reporter's perspective. Ask yourself what is happening at the event that the public should know about? What health information is the public uninformed or misinformed about that this event will address?
- Act as a resource for reporters. Offer to set-up an interview. Always ask interviewees ahead of time for their permission to give their names to a reporter and make sure they are willing and able to communicate correct information about public health. Written information such as fact sheets and statistics can also be helpful to a reporter.
- Be prepared to answer a reporter's questions. If you don't know the answer, tell them that you don't know but will find out and get back to them in a timely manner. Never say, "no comment" or say something is "off the record."

#### **Prepare for the media to attend your event.**

Once you've invited the media via a news release, you should be prepared for them to attend the event. Think about what you want to communicate to the media ahead of time. Consider what the most important messages are for your key audience to hear. Keep your points positive and include a phone number where they can call for more information. If the media attends your event:

- Continue with the event as if they were not there. The media wants to capture the event as it happens. The media should not disrupt the event in any way.
- Designate a person to greet the members of the media and show them where they can set up any equipment.
- Provide written information about the event (news release, event schedule, fact sheets, and/or brochures about your program).
- Suggest people they can interview. Be sure to ask potential interviewees for their permission to be interviewed ahead of time.
- Answer the reporter's questions using your key messages. If you don't know an answer, say so and offer to find out the answer before their deadline. Never say "no comment" or say something is "off the record."
- Look at the reporter, not the camera, and dress appropriately.

#### **Evaluate the results.**

Keeping a record of the number of media personnel who attend your event and what they cover will have many positive outcomes. Media clippings can be used in the future when you apply for grants or report to others in your organization. It will also help to develop relationships with reporters for future newsworthy events or programs.

- Track news stories. Clip media coverage and keep in a file or binder. Include the date of coverage, reporter and media outlet with the clipping. For a fee, video and print clipping services can track media coverage for you. Check your local yellow pages or call the media outlet to find a clipping service.
- Continue to build relationships with reporters in your area— send them newsworthy health information or reports, let them know that you are available for interviews on related health stories, or simply write them a thank you note for helping to inform the public of valuable health information.